

Michigan Time Traveler

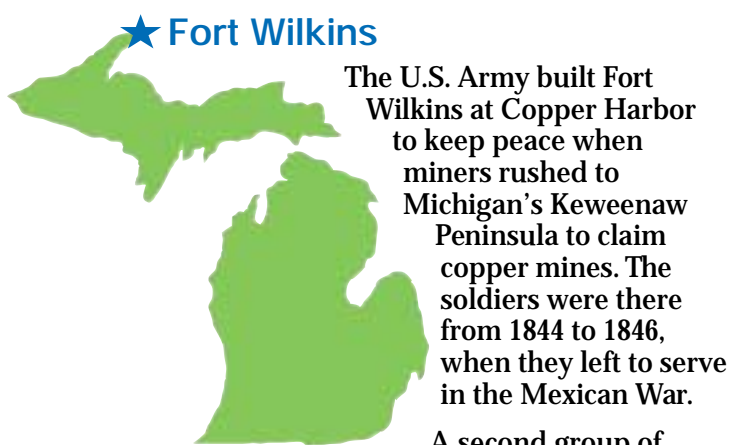
An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center.

KIDS' History

FORT WILKINS

What would it be like to live in a remote fort at the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula in the years following the Civil War? This month's Time Traveler visits students who know the answer.

★ Fort Wilkins



The U.S. Army built Fort Wilkins at Copper Harbor to keep peace when miners rushed to Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula to claim copper mines. The soldiers were there from 1844 to 1846, when they left to serve in the Mexican War.

A second group of soldiers were stationed at the fort after the Civil War, from 1867 to 1870. The army sent them there because it did not have other places for them to live in the Great Lakes area.

The wooden fort became a State Park in 1923. Today it has 12 original buildings and seven reconstructed buildings. The Copper Harbor Lighthouse is also part of the park.

A Bird's-Eye View



Drawing by Richard Geer

Fort Wilkins Legend

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (1) Mess Hall | (9) Quartermaster's Store |
| (2) Company Barracks | (10) Blacksmith Shop |
| (3) Officers Quarters | (11) Bakery |
| (4) Guardhouse | (12) Enlisted Married Men's Quarters |
| (5) Outhouses | (13) Copper Harbor Lighthouse |
| (6) Icehouse | (14) Copper Harbor Lake Superior |
| (7) Sutler's Store | (15) Lake Fanny Hooe |
| (8) Hospital | |

Things To Do

- ♦ At www.michiganhistory.org, search for:
 - ♦ Fort Wilkins and the Copper Harbor Lighthouse
 - ♦ Mining in Michigan (Follow Teachers' Stuff Quick Link)
- ♦ Visit Fort Wilkins and Copper Harbor Lighthouse
 - ♦ Special Programs
 - ♦ June 21- August 22: Fort Wilkins 1870: A Living History Experience (costumed role playing interpretation)
 - ♦ July 19: Fort Wilkins by Candlelight
 - ♦ August 3-4: Civil War-era living history encampment

At the Michigan Historical Museum

- ♦ Visit the copper mine gallery and learn more about the industry that got its start at Copper Harbor.

The Michigan Historical Museum is located two blocks west of the Capitol in downtown Lansing. Museum admission is free. Hours: Monday-Friday: 9 a.m.- 4:30 a.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m.-4:00 p.m.; Sunday: 1-5 p.m. Telephone hotline: (517) 373-3559. Visit the Michigan Historical Museum's Web site:

<http://www.michiganhistory.org>

Living History at Fort Wilkins

Every summer Northern Michigan University students dress in 1867-1870 uniforms and costumes and act as if they are living at Fort Wilkins 130 years ago. Visitors leave the present behind and enter the world of 1870 as they talk with the costumed interpreters about life at this remote outpost.

If you ask who is President, they'll respond "Ulysses S. Grant." They will be able to tell you all about playing "Graces"—using sticks to toss a hoop through the air to one another. They will talk about getting water from Lake Fanny Hooe. But they are very puzzled by words like *television* or *airplane*.

Kate Holmes, the wife of an enlisted man, says, "It ain't so much the snow, but the isolation that can be the death of you."

The Captain talks about the baker. "He's an expert, he is faithful, and baking has been his occupation from a boy."

Future Historians from the Iron Industry Museum in Negaunee join the university students for four three-day workshops in July and August. They play the roles of children at the fort and at Copper Harbour. Like the university students they have spent the previous winter learning history, theater and interpretive skills.



One Future Historian plays marbles. (Photo by Barry James)



A Northern Michigan University student playing the role of Mrs. Kate Holmes, a company laundress, teaches young visitors to play checkers.

Fort Wilkins in the 1860s



Fort Wilkins barracks c. 1860s (State Archives)

Voices from the Past

Lucena Brockway's family was one of the first white families to settle by Lake Superior in 1843, the year the copper rush began. Lucena kept a diary from the mid-1860s onward. After her children grew up, when her husband was away on business, she read, wrote in her diary and wrote letters. She loved to get mail.

In 1867, it snowed late into the spring. There was no mail.

Later, she wrote: "The Propeller Union came about 5 'clock p.m., the first boat of the season. All are glad to see a boat after being shut up five or six months."

She also wrote, "In the evening we got a through mail, the first in two weeks. Got a letter from D.D.B. Two from Charlotte, one from Sarah & Scott, one from Ada Harris, one from Mrs. Broughton, . . . and a dozen papers. And I read more than I was able being so long without any news from the lower world."

Sometimes Lucena recorded events from the newspapers in her diary. In 1871 she wrote 146 letters to thirty-nine people, and received 138 letters from forty different people.

Another woman, Ruth Douglass, settled with her husband in the north. She also kept a diary. "In this solitude . . . we have as many comforts of life here as we should enjoy in almost any place. Many more than I would suppose that had no experience in this new country. We have as yet a plenty of fresh meats such as beef, fish, fowls, rabbits, . . . together with as good vegetables as one could wish to find in any place, also a sufficiency of nick-naks. In short everything for our health and comfort."

Fort Wilkins Time Line

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1820: | Governor Lewis Cass sends an expedition—including Henry Schoolcraft, a mineralogist—to explore the southern shore of Lake Superior. |
| 1844: | Copper Harbor on Lake Superior becomes the center of America's first great mining boom. Fort Wilkins is built. |
| 1846: | Fort Wilkins is abandoned when soldiers are needed to fight in the Mexican War. |
| 1848: | The first Copper Harbor Lighthouse is built. |
| 1866: | The second Copper Harbor Lighthouse is built. |
| 1867: | The U.S. Army needs more barrack space in the Department of Great Lakes and re-opens the fort until 1870. |
| 1880s-90s: | Lake Superior Bicycle Club members go for outings to the fort. |
| 1923: | Fort Wilkins becomes a Michigan State Park. |



A Future Historian laundress washes clothes with a summer visitor. (Photo by Barry James)



Lansing Newspapers In Education (NIE) provides *Lansing State Journal* newspapers and supplemental teaching materials for area classrooms at little or no cost to the schools. The newspaper becomes a "living textbook," providing students with timely and relevant topics for discussion in class and at home.

If you are interested in sponsoring classroom papers or using the newspaper in your classroom, please contact Patricia O'Hearn, NIE Manager at (517) 377-1242.